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E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/10/2016  
TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR EAID KDEM TI  
SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: NDI DEBRIEFS RAKHIMBEKOV ON HIS DETENTION,  
EXPULSION

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard E. Hoagland, Ambassador, EXEC, Embassy  
Dushanbe.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Embassy Dushanbe received the following memo dated May 5 from National Democratic Institute headquarters in Washington. Although it arrived via unclassified e-mail, we are sending it through the classified network because of the sensitivity of the information.

¶2. (C) BEGIN TEXT:

NDI's Country Director in Tajikistan, Nurul Rakhimbekov, was arrested and detained on the evening of April 26 at the Dushanbe airport as he was preparing to board a domestic flight for a political party training. Nurul was detained and interrogated for three full days, after which he was deported to his native Kazakhstan.

Nurul was charged with engaging in sexual relations with a minor. He has asserted that the allegations have no basis in truth, and it is clear that the arrest was politically motivated. It fits into a long-standing pattern of efforts by the government of Tajikistan to shut down NDI's office.

On Monday, May 1, Nurul Rakhimbekov called to provide details on the circumstances of his arrest, detention, and release. The following is a detailed summary of the information he provided. When Nurul visits Washington, DC during the week of May 14, we will obtain further details and verify that the below information is accurate.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26

At 6pm on Wednesday, April 26, Nurul was approached by four men at the Dushanbe airport as he was preparing to travel on a domestic flight to Khujand for a political party training. They stated that they were with the Police Department dealing with organized crime and insisted that he come with them for questioning. They would not say where they planned to take him. When Nurul asked for their IDs, only two of the men would provide them. The other two men refused to show their IDs. Nurul immediately called Elizabeth Horst, Political Officer with the US Embassy in Dushanbe, and she said that she would leave for the airport. Nurul told the men that he would not go with them until Elizabeth arrived. However, they would not wait, and applied force to drag him toward a waiting car. At this time,

one of the men searched his pockets and screamed profanities at him.

They forced him into a car and took him to the Ministry of Security building. When they arrived, one of the men told others that Nurul had threatened to kill him. Once inside the building, Nurul was told that he was being charged with engaging in sexual relations with a minor. He was also told he would spend three days in detention.

After two hours in a waiting room, he was taken to the Head of Investigation's office, where there were four people - the Head of Investigation, two agents, and a consular officer from the Kazakh Embassy. One of the agents asked him if he agreed to let the Kazakh consular officer remain in the room. Nurul thought it was suspicious that the Kazakh consular officer was already at the Ministry of Security, before he had requested any help from the Embassy. He has suggested that this could be evidence that the Kazakh Embassy had advance knowledge of and perhaps collaborated in his arrest.

Nurul requested the presence of a US Embassy representative, since he was an employee of a US organization, but the agents refused his request. They then asked him to sign a protocol of arrest, which he refused to sign.

Two women were then brought into the room and were asked several questions. The first woman said she did not have sexual relations with Nurul and did not see the second woman have sexual relations with him. The second woman did say she had sexual relations with Nurul.

(At this point in the conversation, we asked Nurul if this was true)

According to Nurul, he had a friend from Almaty staying with  
DUSHANBE 00000861 002 OF 003

him. Two nights prior to his arrest, he and his friend had held a small party in Nurul's apartment. The first woman mentioned above was Nurul's friend's girlfriend and was at the apartment the night in question. However, Nurul said that he did not know and had never seen the second woman.

One of the agents mentioned that Nurul's friend had been questioned by authorities but had been permitted to leave the country.

The agents then began asking questions about Nurul's address and family in Almaty.

From this point on, the questioning focused on NDI and its activities in Tajikistan. The agents said they were suspicious of NDI and had been watching NDI's activities closely.

At about 10:45 pm, they ended questioning and told him he would be taken to a pre-trial detention facility. He told the agents that he would not eat or drink until he was granted access to a US Embassy representative.

When he arrived at the detention facility, he was searched, and his shoelaces, belt, passport and personal items were taken from him. His cell was a small room with only a dirty mat and dirty pillow in it - conditions Nurul described as "horrible." He was not able to sleep the entire night.

THURSDAY, APRIL 27

In the morning, guards brought food to him, but he refused to eat it. He was then taken to the Ministry of Security building and into the Head of Investigation's office. Another high-level officer was there - someone who focused on international investigations and who was familiar with a number of international organizations.

Over the course of approximately seven hours, Nurul was

questioned by six different officers in turns. They only asked him questions related to his work and the work of NDI in Tajikistan. He gave them basic information about NDI's programming, emphasizing that there was nothing secretive about NDI's work. The officers seemed to have fairly detailed information about NDI's trainings and events in Dushanbe, and referred to previous conversations with local NDI staff (which NDI-DC is aware of).

The officers asked why he was working with Rano (the head of NDI's civic partner, Women's Political Discussion Club) and Latif (the head of another NDI partner, the Public Commission for Election Monitoring). The officers said that Rano and Latif were only interested in getting money and had no interest in strengthening democracy in Tajikistan.

The officers knew Nurul was bringing money from Almaty every month and wanted to know how much he was bringing. He gave them an estimate of between \$10,000 to \$15,000, which is accurate. They also asked how much the U.S. was planning to spend on democracy-related activities this coming year. Of course, he didn't have that figure on the top of his head.

The agents said that by working for NDI, Nurul was conducting illegal activities, because NDI is not registered as an NGO with the Tajik government. Nurul told them about our many attempts at registration, but this did not stop their accusations.

They told him that his fate was in his hands - he would be freed if he would cooperate with them and provide useful information concerning NDI's activities. They threatened that, if was uncooperative, they could put drugs in his pocket and accuse of him drug possession. They also said that if NDI-Tajikistan's former country director, Gegham Sargsyan, were to return to Tajikistan, they would "give him trouble" as well.

At about 7 pm, the officers took Nurul down to the Head of Investigation's office, where there was a woman and what appeared to be several journalists with cameras. The two women (girlfriend of Nurul's friend and the apparent minor) were also in the room. One officer began an official speech in Tajik, apparently beginning a press conference. Nurul believes the officer summarized the charges against him. The two women were asked questions and provided similar information as they did the night before. Nurul was then asked questions by the journalists about his activities with NDI. The officers then said that, because of Tajikistan's good relations with Kazakhstan, they were willing to let Nurul out of jail and would drop all charges

DUSHANBE 00000861 003 OF 003

against him.

Nurul believes the press conference was faked and was an attempt to pressure him to divulge "useful" information about NDI's activities. He later saw the "journalists" walking around on another floor of the Ministry of Security building, and that they appeared to be employees of the Ministry of Security.

Nurul was then taken back to his cell in the detention facility. One of the "journalists" was also put in his cell. The journalist told Nurul that he had been detained because he was part of the "free" press. Nurul said it was clear that the "journalist" was acting and was only there to extract candid information from Nurul. He was taken out of the cell after a few hours.

That night Nurul was given a clean sheet and a clean pillow cover. He refused food and water again.

FRIDAY, APRIL 28

There were no interrogations on Friday. At about lunchtime, a guard brought him food, but Nurul refused to eat or drink again. He was feeling noticeably weak as the day progressed. The guards would not let him use the restroom. In the evening, he was taken to the facility's doctor. It was difficult for him to walk in his weakened state. The doctor checked his heart rate, blood

pressure, temperature, etc. Nurul told the doctor that he would not allow the doctor to inject him with anything. The doctor exchanged a smile with the guard, but said that he would not inject Nurul. Nurul believes this was another attempt to scare him into "cooperating."

SATURDAY, APRIL 29

At about 1pm, Nurul was removed from his cell and brought to a waiting room, where he met with one of the officers who had arrested him on Wednesday and the Kazakh consular officer. The consular officer explained that the Kazakh Embassy had conducted difficult negotiations with the Ministry of Security and had reached an agreement for his release. If Nurul would agree not to contact any of his US contacts (presumably NDI and the US Embassy) while he was still in Tajikistan, the Ministry of Security would release him and allow him to fly to Almaty, Kazakhstan. They threatened that if he tried to reach any of his US contacts, they would restart the investigation and make it more difficult for him to be released. They threatened that they could easily change the charge to rape.

The Kazakh consular officer said he would return at 6 pm (72 hours after Nurul's arrest) to take Nurul to the Kazakh Embassy for the night, and that Nurul would fly to Almaty the next day.

At about 6pm, Nurul was released from the detention facility. The Kazakh official never came; instead, four Ministry of Security officers took Nurul to the Hotel Tajikistan. Two officers guarded him throughout the night.

SUNDAY, APRIL 30

In the morning, Nurul was taken to the Dushanbe airport. At the airport, Ministry of Security officers returned his passport and took him through security and customs. They again asked for his cooperation in obtaining useful information about NDI. They also said that this incident wouldn't have happened if NDI would have been registered as an NGO. The agents also said that if our local staff continued working, the agents would "give them trouble."

The flight from Dushanbe to Almaty was uneventful, and Nurul traveled from the airport in Almaty to his family's home with no problems.

Since returning to Almaty, Nurul has been recovering and has been keeping a low profile at his family's home.

END TEXT.  
HOAGLAND